

Of course, no work is without flaws, and this book's framing of its subject as a form of play offers one avenue of criticism. Marsh's classification of practical jokes as "unilateral play forms that attempt to compel their targets into play through surprise or trickery" seems to run contrary to the consensus among scholars of play "that play is voluntary and that players are aware they are playing."

While Marsh plainly concedes, "Compulsory, unilateral play is almost a contradiction in terms," she never quite satisfactorily explains away this incongruity beyond acknowledging that potential tricksters should keep their attempts playful (pp. 11, 17). She never quite resolves the inherent friction between the idea that consent is necessary for something to be considered play and the reality that non-consent is necessary to dupe a target into a practical joke.

A more significant flaw in Marsh's analysis is that, as deep as *Practically Joking* dives into the jokes themselves, Marsh casts her research net perhaps less widely than she should. If, as she persuasively argues, practical joking violates cultural norms and highlights social boundaries in ways that depend on specific regional and occupational settings, place would seem to be a major component of practical joke rituals. If this is so, why are her case studies chiefly taken from New Zealand and the United States? Marsh has painted herself into a conceptual corner. If their methods of practical joking unify these distinct cultures enough to justify examining them together, a more precise framing narrative for this approach would be useful. If, on the other hand, practical joking highlights distinctions between disparate places and

their respective populations, a more geographically and ethnically diverse data set would be helpful.

Likewise, Marsh's failure to acknowledge the African-American trickster tale tradition in a study that uses the term trickster to describe practical joke instigators is, at best, a curious omission. In citing the prevalence of trickster figures among various folklore traditions, she lists only Bugs Bunny and the Blues Brothers as American examples. In a work otherwise characterized by analytical precision, this is a particularly glaring misstep.

Such flaws notwithstanding, *Practically Joking* remains a substantial achievement that illuminates a previously understudied subject integral to the history of play and the study of humor. Where it succeeds, it succeeds exceptionally. The close readings of specific practical jokes interweave theory and praxis seamlessly. Where it falls short, it at least raises important questions that demand answers, providing fruitful opportunities for further exploration in subsequent studies. Those who seize these opportunities will owe a debt to Moira Marsh. *Practically Joking* will be an invaluable resource and an unavoidable reference point for anyone following in her footsteps.

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### **The High-Performing Preschool: Story Acting in Head Start Classrooms**

*Gillian Dowley McNamee*

Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago

Press, 2015. Foreword, preface, references, and index. 200 pp. \$22.50 paper. ISBN: 9780226260952

In *The High-Performing Preschool: Story Acting in Head Start Classrooms*, Gillian Dowley McNamee uses Lev Vygotsky's social learning theories to invite readers to think critically about early literacy through Vivian Gussein Paley's practical curriculum on dramatic play and storytelling. McNamee, a Paley apprentice, describes her own research observing urban Head Start children and their teacher, and she illustrates the reciprocity of teaching and learning between child and adult. She tells Paley's story, her own, and that of many teachers who invite children into "a very important space for teaching and learning: the line between our real individual lives and thinking on the stage—the shared space inside the square" (p. 122). In the preschool classroom, this space may be physically constructed of masking tape, but it represents an important space where children can find their public voice among peers within focused zones of proximal development. These public voices are part of school performance.

Equipped with the tools of creative learning, McNamee specifically and rightly addresses urgent educational challenges, asking "How can classroom teachers enhance the oral-language foundations of children who are growing up in communities experiencing economic hardship" (p. xxi). She also ponders, "What curricular approach will initiate them into active verbal participation in a community of learners ready for the full breadth of educational opportunities school has to offer" (p. xxi).

Besides these central questions, additional queries at the end of each chapter entice readers to consider using storytelling and drama within standardized educational constructs. McNamee explains how Paley, framed in Lev S. Vygotsky's theories, provides children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are learning English the opportunity to share their often-overlapping worldviews.

Children in Paley and McNamee's world are empathetic and intelligent actors valued for their perspectives. For instance, in the book, *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, Mrs. Miller asked why the troll is mean? Chantell (a child in the class) responds "His mama dead." Carlos responds "Yeah. She dead," and all the children begin to argue over the troll's past, (p. 17). After some reflection, the teachers admit feeling uncomfortable with the discussion, but they discover these children are considering possibilities adults have missed, such as finding empathy for the homeless and orphaned troll.

In chapter 3, titled "Doing Stories," children begin telling stories about topics spanning from Batman and princesses to angels and death. Here and throughout the book, readers can see how short scaffolded moments—in which children tell their stories, have them written down, and then act them out in the classroom—can support emergent literacy. The practices promote ethics of inclusion (p. ix), nurture children's ownership over language, and require teachers to become leaders in careful observation and assessment for the students' next developmental steps.

McNamee does not expect immediate mastery and uses her own orderly and messy moments, implementing Paley's

curriculum in the classroom to encourage early-childhood educators to give it a try. Michael Cole's thoughtful foreword illustrates the author's commitment to passing knowledge onto others simply and caringly. He writes, "Gillian demonstrates that the Paley curriculum does not require rare pedagogical genius or years of specialized instruction in college classrooms. Given proper support, all teachers can implement it" (p. xvii).

McNamee stays close to the child and the teacher while never losing sight of a broader audience. The author cites Bruno Bettelheim's "regression in progress" and T. Berry Brazelton's *Touchpoints* (pp. 22–23), which speak to the medical and psychological community (as well as teachers). She provides an ethnographic account of Mrs. Miller's Head Start classroom, perhaps interesting for play theorists and anthropologists to analyze.

McNamee also addresses the broader social and policy implications of her work by addressing public school curriculum and policy mandates while also dealing with issues of equal educational access for underserved populations. C. Wright Mills' "sociological imagination" resonates throughout each chapter by indirectly asking early-childhood educators and teacher educators to move beyond their knowledge and routines and to assess critically the social and literary learning present during preschool children's dramatic play.

The book also contributes to current early-childhood education and play literature by bridging play with emerging academic responsibilities and by encouraging (and expecting) adults to be attentive, creative, and analytical about

setting a foundation for children's future individual and social success.

Like Paley and Vygotsky, McNamee values learning that emerges from planned classroom experiences where complex interactions are explored with sensible mentorship. These complex interactions in children's play are not a free for all but an intentional activity enhanced by teacher observation, documentation, and evaluation substantiated by theories and lessons learned from the field. With complicated new curricula and ever changing initiatives geared toward improving student performance, it is refreshing to read a book vested in balancing prescribed literacy curricula with what comes naturally to children: telling stories and exploring their ideas through pretend play.

Paley's extraordinary work comes alive again in this conscientious book in which McNamee shares experiences and knowledge to exemplify how close examinations of play can lend to written, verbal, and kinesthetic expression. Motivated by this narrative, McNamee emphasizes the use of accessible materials and seeks to provide educational solutions that span a full range of publically funded schools.

This book can facilitate more universal and intentional practices—teaching that routinely provides time for interaction; assessment; and reflection for the child, the adult, and the community. *The High Performing Preschool* blends two well-regarded writers' theories and practices to illustrate the purposefulness of children's play and the connections linking oral language development and school success. McNamee concludes by reminding readers, "the most enduring and powerful achievements are in the friendships

formed among children and with their teachers, all of whom were listening to one another” in the process (p. 154). And that is a very important lesson indeed from a book well worth reading.

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—Carrie L. Portrie, *University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH*

**Architecture in Play:  
Intimations of Modernism  
in Architectural Toys**

*Tamar Zinguer*

Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press. 2015. Acknowledgments, notes, illustration credits, and index. 252 pp. \$49.50 cloth. ISBN: 9780813937724

Several architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Buckminster Fuller, and Charles and Ray Eames, have credited Friedrich Froebel and his Kindergarten Gifts with their professional pursuits. As such, what formative influences do toys possess? Responding to this query, Professor of Architecture at Cooper Union Tamar Zinguer seeks answers in her book *Architecture in Play*. Defining construction toys as “kits consisting of individual parts that can be assembled into something larger” (p. 7), she confirms that they imitate as well as intimate architecture—a term suggested by Anthony Vidler, Professor and Dean of the School of Architecture at Cooper Union. More than teaching historical or contemporary architectures, playing with these artifacts teaches children who tinker with blocks a process of experimentation familiar to designers.

Zinguer explains these experiments

in architecture, crystallography, engineering, and pedagogy in accessible language while she supplies ample explanations to help most readers better comprehend the issues. In architecture, for example, she delves into the history of prefabrication and succinctly displays the depth of her knowledge from commercial endeavors like the Levitt Brothers and Lustron Homes to projects by architects Konrad Wachsmann, Buckminster Fuller, and Walter Gropius. The book also contributes to the literature on architects Gustav Lilienthal and Charles and Ray Eames, without providing a full corpus. In addition, readers fascinated with early flight experiments, like those of Alexander Graham Bell or the Lilienthal brothers, or bridge engineering, such as designs by Thomas Bouch or Sir John Fowler, will be pleasantly engrossed and enticed to discover more.

Readers interested in building toys will also be pleased. In four generously illustrated chapters, Zinguer covers six of the most popular and long-produced construction toys from the late nineteenth century to the middle twentieth century in Europe and North America. Friedrich Froebel’s Kindergarten Gifts and Occupations (1836) instructed children in the unity of life which reflected his academic interests in the science of crystals lead by Samuel Weiss. Weiss translated the work of Abbé René Hüay who noted how crystals broke into basic shapes and developed a theory of crystallographic axes. Taking this knowledge, Froebel’s second gift adopted these axes. The first two case studies tell a lineage of these objects because Gustav Lilienthal illustrated Froebel’s manual.

Unlike Froebel, who never lived to see Edward Wiebé’s interpretation and Milton